

Bruce Lee - "The lost interview"

Pierre Burton: Well... how can you play in Mandarin movies if you don't even speak Mandarin?

Bruce Lee: Well first of all, I speak only Cantonese.

Pierre: Yeah.

Bruce Lee: So, I mean, there is quite a difference as pronunciation and things like that is concerned.

Pierre: So somebody else's voice is used right?

Bruce Lee: Definitely, definitely!!

Pierre: So you just make the words...doesn't that sound strange when you go to the movies, especially in Hong Kong, your home town, and you see yourself with somebody else's voice?

Bruce Lee: Well not really, you see, because most of the mandarin pictures here are dubbed anyway.

Pierre: They're dubbed anyway?

Bruce Lee: Anyway. I mean in this regard, they shoot without sound. So it doesn't make any difference.

Pierre: Your lips never quite make the right words, do they?

Bruce Lee: Yeah, well that's where the difficulty lies, you see. I mean in order to...the Cantonese have a different way of saying things...I mean different from the mandarin. So I have to find, like, something similar to that in order to keep a kind of a feeling going behind that (in my films). Something, you know, matching the mandarin deal. Does it sound complicated?

Pierre: Just like in the silent picture days (the old silent days). I gather that in the movies made here the dialogue is pretty stilted anyway.

Bruce Lee: Yeah, I agree with you. I mean, see, to me, a motion picture is motion. I mean, you've got to keep the dialogue down to the minimum.

Pierre: Did you look at mainly Mandarin movies before you started playing in your first one?

Bruce Lee: Yes.

Pierre: What did you think of them?

Bruce Lee: Quality wise, I mean, I would have to admit that it's not quite up to the standard. However, it is growing and it is getting higher and higher and going toward that standard that I would term quality.

Pierre: They say the secret of your success in that movie, the "Big Boss", that was such a success here, and rocketed you to stardom in Asia, was that you did your own fighting.

Bruce Lee: Uh-huh.

Pierre: As an expert in the various martial arts in China, what did you think of the fighting that you saw in the movies that you studied before you became a star?

Bruce Lee: Well, I mean, definitely in the beginning, I had no intention whatsoever, that what I was practicing, and what I'm still practicing now would lead to this, to begin with. **But martial art has had a very, very deep meaning as far as my life is concerned because, as an actor, as a martial artist, as a human being, all these I have learned from martial art.**

Pierre: Maybe for our audience who doesn't know what it means, you might be able to explain what exactly you mean by martial art?

Bruce Lee: Right. martial art includes all the combative arts like Karate...

Pierre: Judo.

Bruce Lee: ...or Karate, Judo (agrees), Chinese Gung-fu, or Chinese boxing, whatever you call it. All those, you see, like, Aikido, Korean Karate, and on and on and on. But it's a combative form of fighting. I mean some of them became sport, but some of them art still not. I mean some of them use, for intense, kicking to the groin, jabbing fingers to the eyes, things like that.

Pierre: No wonder you're successful in it! The Chinese movies are full of this kind of action anyway...they needed a guy like you! (they both laugh)

Bruce Lee: Violence, man!

Pierre: So you didn't have to use a double when you moved into the motion picture role here.

Bruce Lee: No.

Pierre: You did it all yourself?

Bruce Lee: Right.

Pierre: Can you break five or six pieces of wood with your hand or foot?

Bruce Lee: I'd probably break my hand and foot! (they both laugh)

Pierre: Tell me a little bit....you set up a school in Hollywood didn't you?

Bruce Lee: Yes.

Pierre: For people like James Garner, Steve McQueen and the others.

Bruce Lee: Yes.

Pierre: Why would they want to learn Chinese martial art? Because of a movie role?

Bruce Lee: **Not really. Most of them you see, to me at least, the way that I teach it, all types of knowledge ultimately means self-knowledge. Therefore, these people are coming in and asking me to teach them, not so much how to defend themselves, or how to do somebody in, rather, they want to learn to express themselves through some movement, be it anger, be it determination or whatever. So, in other words, what I'm saying therefore, is that they're paying me to show them, in combative form, the art of expressing the human body.**

Pierre: Which is acting, in a sense, isn't it?

Bruce Lee: well.....

Pierre: or would be a useful tool for an actor....

Bruce Lee: **It might sound too philosophical, but it's unacting acting or acting unacting....if you know..**

Pierre: You've lost me!

Bruce Lee: **I have huh? So what I'm saying, actually, you see, it's a combination of both. I mean here is natural instinct and here is control. You are to combine the two in harmony. Not...if you have one to the extreme, you'll be very unscientific. If you have another to the extreme, you become, all of a sudden, a mechanical man...no longer a human being. So it is a successful combination of both, so therefore, it's not pure naturalness, or unnaturalness. The ideal is unnatural naturalness, or natural unnaturalness.**

Pierre: **Yin/yang, eh?**

Bruce Lee: Right man, that's it.

Pierre: One of your students, James Coburn , played in a movie called "Our Man Flint", in which he used Karate. Was that what he learned from you?

Bruce Lee: He started training with me after the film. Not...

Pierre: So he learned after he played in "Our Man Flint".

Bruce Lee: Right. Right. You see, actually, **I do not teach, you know, Karate, because I do not believe in styles anymore. I mean I do not believe that there is such thing as, like, a Chinese way of fighting or a Japanese way of fighting...or whatever way of fighting, because unless a human being has three arms and four legs, there can be no different form of fighting. But, basically, we only have two hands and two feet. So styles tend to, not only separate man because they have their own doctrines and the doctrine became the gospel truth that you cannot change! But, if you do not have styles, if you just say, "here I am as a human being, how can I express myself totally and completely?" ...now that way, you won't create a style because style is a crystallization. That way is a process of continuing growth.**

Pierre: You talk about Chinese boxing....how does it defer, from, say, our kind of boxing? (western)

Bruce Lee: Well, first we use the feet.

Pierre: Uh-huh, that's a start.

Bruce Lee: And then we use the elbow.

Pierre: Do you use the thumb too?

Bruce Lee: You name it man, we use it!

Pierre: You use it all?

Bruce Lee: **You have to, you see, because that is the expression of the human body. I mean, everything, not just the hand! When you are talking about combat, well, if it is a sport..well now your talking about something else, with regulations, and rules..but if you're talking about fighting...**

Pierre: No rules.....

Bruce Lee: **...with no rules, well then, baby, you'd better train every part of your body! And when you do punch..now I'm leaning forward a little bit hoping not to hurt any camera angle..I mean you've got to put the whole hip into it, and snap it! (Lee punches twice, very quickly) and get all your energy in there and make this into a weapon.**

Pierre: I don't want to tangle with you on any dark night, I'll tell you that right now! You came at me pretty fast there! What is the difference between Chinese boxing and what we see these old men doing at eight o'clock every morning on the rooftops and he parks called 'shadowboxing'. Which they're always doing?

Bruce Lee: Well, actually, you see, that is part of Chinese boxing. There are as many schools, different schools...

Pierre: Everybody here seems to be going like this (*moves in a tai-chi movement*) all the time.

Bruce Lee: Well, that's good. I mean, I'm very glad, I'm very glad to see that because at least somebody is caring for their own bodies, right?

Pierre: Yeah.

Bruce Lee: I mean that's a good sign. Well it's kind of a slow form of exercise which is called tai-chi-chuan...I'm speaking mandarin just now...in Cantonese, 'Kai-di-kune', and it's more of an exercise for the elderly than the young.

Pierre: Give me a demonstration; show me, can you do a little bit of it?

Bruce Lee: (begins a seated demonstration of tai chi hand movements...) **I mean, have-wise, it's very slow and you push it out but all the time you are keeping the continuity going; bending, stretching, everything. You just keep it moving.**

Pierre: It looks like a ballet dancer there...

Bruce Lee: **It is..I mean to them the idea is "running water never grows stale". So you've got to just "keep on flowing".**

Pierre: **Of all your students, famous, James Garner, Steve McQueen, Lee Marvin, James Coburn, Roman Polanski, which was the best? Who adapted best to this oriental form of exercise and defense?**

Bruce Lee: Well, that depends...as a fighter, Steve...Steve McQueen...now, he is good in that department because, that son of a gun has got the toughness in him....

Pierre: I see it on the screen....

Bruce Lee: I mean, he would say, "all right baby, here I am, man", you know, and he'll do it! Now James Coburn is peace-loving man....

Pierre: I met him.

Bruce Lee: Right? I mean, you've met him....

Pierre: Yeah.

Bruce Lee: I mean he's really, really nice, and super mellow, and all that...

Pierre: Yeah, he is!

Bruce Lee: You know what I mean? Now he appreciates the philosophical part of it. Therefore, his understanding of it is deeper than Steve's. So it's really hard to say, you see what I'm saying now?

Pierre: I see....

Bruce Lee: I mean it's different, depending on what you see in it...

Pierre: **It's interesting, we don't in our world, and haven't since the days of the Greeks who did, combined philosophy and art with sport. But quite clearly the oriental attitude is that the three are facets of the same thing.**

Bruce Lee: **Man, listen to me, ok? To me, ultimately, martial art means honestly expressing yourself. Now it is very difficult to do. I mean it is easy for me to put on a show and be cocky and be flooded with a cocky feeling and then feel, then, like pretty cool and all that. Or I can make all kinds of phony things, you see what I mean? And be blinded by it. Or I can show you some really fancy movement, but, to express oneself honestly, not lying to oneself....and to express myself honestly, that, my friend is very hard to do. And you have to train. You have to keep your reflexes so that when you want it...it's there! When you want to move, you are moving and when you move you are determined to move. Not taking one inch, not anything less than that! If I want to punch, I'm going to do it man, and I'm going to do it! So that is the type of thing you gave to train yourself into it; to become one with it. You think....(snaps his fingers)it is.**

Pierre: This is very un-western, this attitude... ..

I've been talking to Bruce Lee, mainly about the Chinese martial arts which include things like Chinese boxing, Karate and Judo, which is what he taught when he was in Hollywood after he left the university of Washington, where he studied, of all things, philosophy, if you can believe that. But he did but that, perhaps you understand why the two go together from the first half of this program and you can perhaps understand how he got into films, he knew a lot of actors but I'm told that you got the job on the "Green Hornet", where you played Kato the chauffeur mainly because you were the only Chinese-looking guy who could pronounce the name of the leading character, "Britt Reid"!

Bruce Lee: I meant that as a joke of course! And it's a heck of name, man! I mean every time I said it at that time I was super-conscious! I mean, really now, that's another interesting thing, huh? Lets say if you learn to speak Chinese...

Pierre: Yeah?

Bruce Lee: **It's not difficult to learn and speak the words. The hard thing, the difficult thing, is behind what is the meaning: what brought on the expression and feelings behind those words. Like, then I first arrived in the United States and I looked at a Caucasian, and I really would not know whether he was putting me on or is he really angry? Because we have different ways of reacting to it...those are the difficult things, you see?**

Pierre: **Of course. It's almost as if you came upon a strange race where a smile didn't mean what it does to us. In fact, a smile doesn't always mean the same, does it?**

Bruce Lee: Of course, not.

Pierre: Yeah, I just thought of that. Tell me about the big break when you played in Longstreet...

Bruce Lee: Ahh, that's it.

Pierre: I must tell our audience that Bruce lee had a bit part, or a supporting role in the Longstreet series and this had an enormous effect on the audience. What was it?

Bruce Lee: Well, you see, the title of that particular episode of Longstreet is called "The Way of the Intercepting Fist". Now I think the successful ingredient in it was because I was being Bruce lee.

Pierre: Yourself.

Bruce Lee: Myself, right. And did that part, just expressed myself, like I say, "honestly expressed myself", at that time. And I, because of that, brought, you know, favorable mentioning in, like, the New York times, which says, like, "a chinaman who, incidentally, came off quite convincingly enough to earn himself a television series" and so on and so on and so forth.

Pierre: Can you remember the key lines by stirling silliphant? The key lines?

Bruce Lee: He's one of my students, you know that?

Pierre: Was he too?

Bruce Lee: yes...

Pierre: **Everybody's your student! But you read, there were some key lines there that expressed your philosophy. I don't know if you remember them or not....**

Bruce Lee: **Oh I remember them, I said....**

Pierre: Let's hear...

Bruce Lee: This is what it is, ok?

Pierre: You're talking to Longstreet played by James Franciscus...

Bruce Lee: **I said, "empty your mind, be formless, shapeless, like water. Now you put water into a cup, it becomes the cup. You put water into a bottle, it becomes the bottle. You put it in a teapot, it becomes the teapot. Now water can flow, or it can crash! Be water, my friend'...like that, you see?**

Pierre: **Yeah, I see, I get the idea. I get the power behind it...**

Bruce Lee: Uh-huh....

Pierre: So, now, two things have happened; first there's a pretty good chance that you'll get a TV series in the states called "The Warrior", isn't it? Where you use what--the martial arts in a western setting?

Bruce Lee: Well that was the original idea. Now Paramount, you know I did Longstreet for Paramount, and Paramount wants me to be in a television series. On the other hand, Warner brothers wants me to be in another one. But both of them, I think, they want me to be in a modernized type of a thing and they think that the western idea is out! Whereas I want....

Pierre: You want to do the western!

Bruce Lee: I want to do the western because, you see, I mean, or else can you justify all of this punching and kicking and violence except in the period of the west? I mean, nowadays, I mean you don't go around on the street, kicking and punching people....(*pretends to reach into his jacket for a gun*) because if you do....(*pulls out his imaginary gun and pulls the trigger*) Pow! that's it. I mean, I don't care how "good" you are.

Pierre: Yeah, a gun, but this is true also of the Chinese dramas, which are mainly costume dramas. they're all full of blood and gore over here!

Bruce Lee: Oh you mean here?

Pierre: Yeah.

Bruce Lee: Well, unfortunately, that's often the case. You see, I hope that the picture I am in would either explain why the violence was done...whether right or wrong, or what not...but, unfortunately, pictures, most of them here, are done mainly just for the sake of violence. You know what I mean? Like, you know, guys fighting for 30 minutes straight, getting stabbed 50 times! (*acts like he is stabbing himself and knocks his microphone off his shirt*)

Pierre: Well I'm fascinated, here, let me give you your microphone back...

Bruce Lee: I am a martial artist....

Pierre: I'm fascinated that you came back to Hong Kong on the verge of success in Hollywood...and full of it..and suddenly, on the strength of one picture, you become a superstar. Everybody knows you. You have to change your phone number. You get mobbed in the streets. Now what are you going to do? Are you going to be able to live in both worlds? Are you going to be a superstar here or one in the States...or both?

Bruce Lee: **Well, let me say this. First of all, the word "superstar" really turns me off...and I'll tell you why... the word "star" man, it's an illusion. It's something what the public calls you. You should look upon oneself as an actor, man. I mean you would be very pleased if somebody said (punches his fist into his open hand) "man, you are a super actor!" It is much better than, you know, superstar. therefore, i...**

Pierre: Yes, but you've got to admit that you are a superstar. You're not going to....you're not going to....if you're going to give me the truth!

Bruce Lee: **I am now....I am honestly saying this, okay? Yes, I have been very successful, okay?**

Pierre: Yeah....

Bruce Lee: **But I think the word "star" is....I mean I do not look upon myself as a star. I really don't. I mean believe me, man, when I say it. I mean I'm not saying it because....**

Pierre: What are you going to do? Let's get back to the question.

Bruce Lee: (laughs) Ok.

Pierre: Are you going to stay in Hong Kong and be famous, or are you going to go to the United States and be famous, or are you going to try to eat your cake and have it too?

Bruce Lee: I am going to do both because, you see, I have already made up my mind that, in the United States, I think something about the oriental, I mean the true oriental, should be shown.

Pierre: Hollywood sure as heck hasn't!

Bruce Lee: You better believe it man. I mean it's always that pigtail, bouncing around, "chop-chop", you know? With the eyes slanted and all that. And I think that's very, very out of date.

Pierre: Is it true that the first job you had was being cast as Charlie Chan's "number one son?"

Bruce Lee: Yeah, "number one son". (they both laugh)

Pierre: They never made the movie?

Bruce Lee: No, they were going to make it into a new Chinese James bond type of a thing. Now that, you know, "the old man Chan is dead, Charlie is dead, and his son is carrying on".

Pierre: Oh I see. but they didn't do that.

Bruce Lee: No, Batman came along you see. And then everything started to go into that kind of a thing.

Pierre: Like the Green Hornet?

Bruce Lee: Yeah.

Pierre: Which you were in...

Bruce Lee: By the way, I did a really terrible job in that, I have to say.

Pierre: Really? You didn't like yourself in that?

Bruce Lee: Oh, no.

Pierre: I didn't see it. Let me ask you, however, about the problems that you face as a Chinese hero in an American series. Have people come up in the industry and said, "well we don't know how the audience are going to take a non-American"?

Bruce Lee: Well, such a question has been raised. in fact, it is being discussed and that is probably why the warrior is not going to be on.

Pierre: I see.

Bruce Lee: You see? Because, unfortunately, such a thing does exist in this world, you see. Like, I don't know, in a certain part of the country, right? Where they think that, business wise, it's a risk. And I don't blame them..I don't blame them. I mean, in the same way, it's like in Hong Kong, if a foreigner came and became a star, if I were the man with the money, I probably would have my own worry of whether or not the acceptance would be there. But that's all right because, if you honestly express yourself, it doesn't matter, see? Because you're going to do it!

Pierre: How about the other side of the coin? is it possible that you, I mean you're fairly hip, and fairly Americanized, are you too western for our oriental audiences do you think?

Bruce Lee: I..oh man!..Like how...I have been criticized for that!

Pierre: You have, eh?

Bruce Lee: Oh, definitely. Let me say this: when I do the Chinese film I'll try my best not to be as.....American as, you know, I have been adjusted to for the last 12 years in the States. But when I go back to the States, it seems to be the other way around, you know what I mean?

Pierre: You're too exotic, eh?

Bruce Lee: Yeah, man. I mean they're trying to get me to do too many things that are really for the sake of being exotic. You understand what I'm trying to say?

Pierre: Oh sure.

Bruce Lee: So, it's really, I mean....

Pierre: When you live in both worlds, it brings its problems as well as its advantages, and you've got them both. Let me ask you whether the change in attitude on the part of the Nixon administration towards China has helped your chances of starring in an American TV series?

Bruce Lee: (laughs) well, first of all, this happened before that. But I don't think that things of Chinese will be quite interesting for the next few years...I mean not that I'm politically inclining toward anything, you know, but...

Pierre: I understand that, but I was just wondering....

Bruce Lee: But I mean once the opening of China happens, you know, I mean that it will bring more understanding! More things that are, hey, like different, you know? And maybe in the contrast of comparison some new thing might grow. So, therefore, I mean it's a very rich period to be in. I mean like, if I were born, let's say 40 years ago and if I thought in my mind and said, "boy, I'm going to star in a television series in America", well...that might be a vague dream. But I think, right now, it may be, man.

Pierre: Do you still think of yourself as Chinese or do you ever think of yourself as a north American?

Bruce Lee: You know what I want to think of myself? As a human being. because, I mean I don't want to sound like ask Confucius, sayyyyyy... (joking) but under the sky, under the heaven, man, there is but one family. It just so happens that people are different.

Pierre: Ok, we've got to go...thank you Bruce lee for coming here, and thank you for watching...

Bruce Lee: Thank you, Pierre, thank you.